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EAST TIMOR REPORT

NONE SHALL MAKE THEM AFRAID

The Report of a Visit to East Timor by an Ecumenical Delegation representing the World Council of Churches [WCC] and the Christian Conference of Asia [CCA]: 26-29 June 1996

A. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Christian Church of East Timor [GKTT] and with the assistance of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia [PGI/CCI], an ecumenical team visited East Timor. The first such visit, which had taken place four years earlier in April 1992, led to the setting up of a joint WCC/CCA task force to advise both bodies on matters relating to East Timor. Under its auspices a joint WCC/CCA consultation on the Churches' Concern for East Timor had been held in Hong Kong in December 1994. For further information on these initiatives see East Timor: Prospects for Peace, WCC, 1994. In September 1995, the GKTT was received into the membership of the WCC, and so the visit of 1996 was to a member church which was anxious to demonstrate its concern not simply to receive the support of the world body but itself to participate in the life of the wider family of Christ giving its support to those who needed it.

2. The membership of the delegation was:

John Briggs, United Kingdom, Historian, Member of the Executive and Central Committees of the WCC
Sumie Iwata, Japan, Director, Centre for Christian Responses to Asian Issues, Member of the CCA General Committee
David Gill, Australia, General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Australia,
Aida Jean Nacpil Manipon, International Affairs, CCA
Clement John, International Affairs, WCC,

who represented both the world and the regional ecumenical bodies.

They were assisted by Stien Djalil of the staff of PGI who served as interpreter.

3. The team sought to convey the continuing concern of Christians elsewhere for the people and churches of East Timor, and tried to deepen their understanding of the extremely complicated situation in this former Portuguese colony. They attempted in particular to discern ways in which their two sponsoring organisations should respond to the changing situation in East Timor.

4. The visit took place soon after a number of incidents had occurred, for example that on 7th and 8th June in the vicinity of Baucau involving damage to a mosque and the killing of a soldier which had led to the detention of some 79 young people which exemplified the volatility of the region. The visit took

place immediately before the four yearly meeting of the Synod of the GKTT.

5. Immediately following its visit to East Timor the team was able to present its most immediate reflections at a meeting with the General Moderator and the General Secretary of the PGI in Jakarta.

6. Team members welcomed the opportunity for discussions with: the Revd Arlindo Marcal, Moderator of the GKTT; Bishop C.T. Ximenes Belo, Apostolic Administrator, Diocese of Dili, and his Chancellor, the Revd. Dominguez Sequrera; members of the Executive Committee of the Synod of the GKTT; other clergy and members of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches; the pastor, lay leaders and young people of the two GKTT congregations in Baucau; Florentino Sermento, ETADEP; and in Jakarta after the visit Ade Rostina Sitompul of the Joint Committee for the Defence of the East Timorese.

7. Three members of the delegation had made previous visits to East Timor.

B. Three Reflections on the Life of the Churches.

8. THE MISSION OF THE GKTT

The team was delighted to note the growth of the GKTT and to visit it as a new member church of the WCC. The group was pleased to see two newly built churches, one in Dili and one in Baucau, as well as the new headquarters building of the GKTT.

9. The GKTT in its common life is a witness to the unity of all God's people as it brings together Christians from a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds from different parts of the Republic of Indonesia.

10. At the same time, it recognises that it has a special mission to the Timorese people and special responsibilities to undertake advocacy for the needs and aspirations, and to minister to the distress and fear under which many of them live.

11. THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Given the various threats to the community in East Timor, it is of the highest importance that every opportunity be grasped, and even created, for Catholics and Protestants to work together with one another, not allowing incidents or processes to drive a wedge between the churches. The team received clear evidence that certain political interests were eager to do just that.

12. FROM POLITICAL TO INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

It was suggested to the team that agencies in Indonesia under Islamic influence were seeking to relocate the conflict in East Timor, turning it from a dispute between political parties and positions into an inter-religious issue, sometimes Catholic v Protestant, but more importantly Christian v Muslim, putting the Pancasila principle at risk. This was a new emphasis not so obviously to be seen or witnessed in earlier visits.

C. Three Reflections on the Socio-economic Situation

13. HUMAN RIGHTS.

Despite systematic and persistent efforts by the Indonesian government to silence the voice of the international community on human-rights violations in East Timor, the issue remains high on the agenda of inter-governmental organizations like the United Nations and the European Community. In a statement issued during the recently concluded 1996 session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Mr Ayala Lasso, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, mentioned the grave human-rights violations taking place in the territory, calling upon the Indonesian government to take action to improve the situation.

14. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights is presently engaged in negotiations with the Indonesian government for the opening of a human-rights office in Jakarta. The High Commissioner wants his team of monitors to be able to visit East Timor as often as is necessary and to make frequent reports to him on the situation there.

15. The necessity of the High Commissioner's request became clear to the delegation when it spoke to a number of East Timorese and heard stories of torture, illegal detentions, disappearances, and unlawful killings, and was confirmed in the documentation provided by the Joint Committee for the Defence of the East Timorese. Repression started by the Indonesian security forces in 1975 goes on unabated despite outward appearances of calm and normalcy. The black-hooded Ninja gangs of 1995 have disappeared only to be replaced by unidentified para-military groups that operate with complete impunity, spreading fear, terror and havoc particularly in rural areas.

16. The military apparently have no control over the activities of these groups which considerably add to a climate of fear amongst the people. Reports of misbehaviour by the lower ranks of the military particularly in their dealings with youth are common. Most of the repression takes place in the context of counter-insurgency measures carried out on the pretext of maintaining national security and fighting the armed resistance to Indonesian forces.

17. In the judgment of Bp. Belo, in such circumstances it is crucial that international solidarity work in support of the East Timorese struggle continue.

18. TRANS-MIGRATION

The team was told that the trans-migration policy of the Indonesian government forms part of its overall efforts to integrate and develop the province. Under this policy, large numbers of Indonesians from other islands have been encouraged to settle in East Timor. Some of the migrants have brought their skills and have contributed to the development effort. In comparison to the local people, most of these migrants are well-equipped and have little or no difficulty in finding jobs. But for local people scarcity of employment opportunities in the province results in frustration and hostility towards the migrants.

19. Whilst the team was staying in the republic publicity was given in the daily papers to a statement of government opinion which denied the validity of the concept of indigeneous people, all peoples being citizens of the republic and only that. Not surprisingly, therefore, many East Timorese see in the present migrant policy of the government, which a deliberate attempt to destroy the indigenous culture and future of the Timorese people as a distinct ethnic group in their own land.

20. The fact that the migrants come form different cultural and religious backgrounds has further aggravated the situation. Growing religious and ethnic tensions particularly amongst the youth have resulted in increasing conflicts between the indigenous people (Putrah daerah) and migrants (Pendatong). The climate of suspicion, fear and hatred generated by this has seriously hampered development efforts.

21. Whilst recognizing that the children of migrants who know no other home than East Timor should not be discriminated against, there is an urgent need to review the present migration trends and patterns. Unless this task is undertaken on an urgent basis, there is likelihood of present tensions building up into a major conflagration which can only add to the difficulties of the East Timor situation.

22. DEVELOPMENT

To create confidence in its development programmes, the government needs to be sensitive to the socio-cultural background of the people.

23. The team continues to affirm that economic development without the ability of the Timorese people to participate fully in the making of the decisions which will shape their future lives is a wholly inadequate policy for East Timor. However, they now notice that because of this, even development programmes themselves are suffering since it becomes increasingly difficult to motivate people to take responsibility for these activities in an atmosphere where there is a very high level of corrosive suspicion and fear. In these circumstances, development ceases to be development as communities lapse into dependency upon a wide variety of development-agency handouts.

24. This leads the group to believe that only as a culture of hope, rather than one of fear, is fostered is there any chance of development programmes having any success. An expectation of consistent progress towards full participation in decision-making, uninterrupted by arbitrary military intervention, is a necessary precondition to enable development programmes themselves to be able to achieve their goals, and thus to meet the needs of empowering the local people to deploy their energies and talents to create their own future in the context of a multi-cultural, multi- religious society which guarantees justice to all its members.

D. Recommendations:

25. ECUMENICAL SOLIDARITY

The team discerns the unique potential of the churches in East Timor for becoming instruments of hope, unity, and justice for the people of East Timor. It is important for the international ecumenical community to be with them and to strengthen the bonds of ecumenical fellowship that have been built over the past several years.

Toward these ends, it is recommended that :

25.1. The WCC and CCA explore with the churches in East Timor whether some form of overseas Christian presence from the wider ecumenical fellowship would at all be helpful to the churches there, and if so, in what appropriate form (e.g. internship, etc.) Such presence in East Timor should be seen as an expression of the continuing concern of the wider ecumenical fellowship for the churches in East Timor. It is also envisaged that this would also facilitate communication with the churches in East Timor and enhance the ecumenical community's understanding of the realities there. [ACTION: WCC/CCA/GKTT]

25.2. Visitations to the churches in East Timor by the WCC, CCA, and churches be encouraged in order to continue face-to-face contacts and conversations. The importance of wider ecumenical participation in such visitations cannot be exaggerated. It is hoped that the CCA, with its increased lines of dialogue and cooperation with the FABC, would explore joint visitations with the FABC along these lines. The importance of consultation and the sharing of information within the ecumenical community, especially with the PGI, on initiatives in this regard is underlined. [ACTION: WCC/CCA]

26. INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

The team notes the increased communication between the GKTT and the Roman Catholic Church in East Timor and views this as a very positive step towards better relations between different religious communities. However, they are gravely concerned about the recent outbreak of tensions between Christians and Muslims.

It is recommended that:

26.1 This situation be addressed and checked immediately to avoid the development of more serious conflicts. The need to create avenues for inter-religious dialogue has become more pronounced. Such dialogues should be initiated by the religious communities themselves and should make their impact at grassroots levels. [ACTION GKTT/PGI/WCC/CCA]

26.2 The international ecumenical fellowship support and accompany the churches, whenever necessary and possible, in their efforts along these lines. [ACTION: WCC/CCA]

26.3 The continuing endeavours of the PGI to strengthen Christian-Muslim relations in various levels of life in Indonesia are noted; the team supports these in the hope that such efforts will contribute to the prevention and/or resolution of religious conflict. [ACTION: PGI]

27. YOUTH

This brief visit to East Timor made the team realize even more the importance of the role of the youth sector within the churches and the wider community. As youth are often made to bear the burden of underdevelopment in any society, this is particularly true in East Timor where unemployment has dramatically increased among young people. The native (indigenous) East Timorese who comprise the majority of the youth population, have become more marginalized and alienated, with increasing feelings of uncertainty for the future as well as loss of identity. On the other hand, there is also a significant sector of second-generation migrant youth who are also losing hopes for future employment and self-development.

It is recommended that:

27.1 The churches provide the space for contact between young people from different ethnic backgrounds in the hope of nurturing solidarity for a vision of a better society in East Timor. [ACTION: GKTT]

27.2 The church is challenged to provide a "model" of "living together" where the aspirations of the native (indigenous) East Timorese are addressed and given due respect. The youth are an important sector who have the potential for carrying on church renewal and social transformation. [ACTION: GKTT]

27.3 The international community seek creative ways to assist and accompany the churches in East Timor in developing appropriate programmes to meet the needs and aspirations of the youth. [ACTION: WCC/CCA]

28. PEACE AND JUSTICE

Peace and justice are universal aspirations of the churches and people in East Timor. In the words of a young native East Timorese civil servant, Christians aspire for peace and justice, and for all people to be able to live fully as human beings in East Timor. At the core of the search for peace and justice lies the need to respect the voice of the East Timorese, as well as the need for ensuring that they enjoy the promise of life in abundance. In this context, human-rights issues need to be immediately and adequately addressed.

It is recommended that:

28.1. The ecumenical community explore with the PGI and the churches in East Timor the creation of a mechanism for dealing with human-rights issues in an adequate and effective way. [ACTION: WCC/CCA/PGI]

28.2. The ecumenical community, in partnership with the PGI and the churches in East Timor, find ways by which the voices of the East Timorese and their aspirations for peace and justice can be heard and listened to inside the church an the wider society. [ACTION: WCC/CCA/PGI]

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